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Salisbury Fire Chief Bob Parnell Receives “Distinguished Citizen of the Year” Award at Annual Civitan Banquet

Salisbury, NC_September 19, 2008 – Salisbury Chief Bob Parnell has been named the 2008 “Distinguished Citizen of the Year” by the Civitan Club of Salisbury. The honor was bestowed before a crowd of over eighty members, spouses and honored guests at the Salisbury Country Club on Thursday evening, during the Civitans’ annual Awards & Installation Banquet for 2008.

Salisbury Mayor Susan Kluttz, Mayor Pro-tem Paul Woodson, Councilman Mark Lewis, City Manager David Treme, and PIO Karen Wilkinson were in attendance at the ceremony in addition to Parnell’s wife Tonya and son Adam. Parnell’s older son Bobby, a pitcher with the New York Mets, was unable to attend the ceremony due to a scheduled game. The award was a surprise to Chief Parnell who had not previously been made aware of the presentation.

During a heart-felt recitation featuring Parnell’s biography, Councilman Mark Lewis shared the following, “Bob Parnell officially entered the fire service on his eighteenth birthday as a volunteer firefighter in Oakhurst, NJ. Bob shares that he was born into the fire service; his father was a firefighter and fire chief and his mother served on the fire department ladies auxiliary. His uncles were firefighters and fire chiefs and his cousins also served as firefighters. His grandparents served the Eatontown, New Jersey Volunteer Fire Department. Parnell’s grandfather served as a firefighter. His grandmother was part of the notification system as she activated the loud siren atop the fire station and later served on the telephone calling tree, utilized to notify firefighter households of emergency calls.” Lewis shared a quote from Parnell in summary, “I never knew anything else but that I wanted to be a firefighter.”

Lewis continued by sharing Parnell’s employment history and educational accomplishments with attendees. “Chief Parnell has served the Salisbury Fire Department since 1984. During his 24 years of service, Parnell was a firefighter from 1984-1985, an engineer from ’85-’86 and a captain from ’86-’88. Serving as a Battalion Chief from 1988-2004, Parnell was promoted to Chief in 2004.” When

asked about his service with the city, Parnell always makes a point to share that he has “proudly served” the City of Salisbury and its citizens.

Councilman Lewis noted, “Parnell is a 1981 graduate of Rowan Cabarrus Community College (RCCC) with an Associate Degree in Fire Science. Parnell also received an Associate Degree in Fire Protection Engineering from RCCC in 1984. A 1997 graduate of the National Fire Academy, Parnell has received the coveted Executive Fire Officer (EFO) Degree and is a 2004 graduate of the North Carolina Institute of Government’s Municipal Administration program. Parnell is currently completing his Bachelor Degree from NC A&T State University in Occupational Safety and Health.”

In addition, Lewis shared remarks written by Mayor Susan Kluttz, offering her sincere admiration and genuine respect for Chief Parnell. “I have never known a finer person than Bob Parnell. Working with him during these last ten years, I have consistently been impressed with his character, his integrity and his dedication to his profession. But, the true test of a person is how he handles adversity. These last months have been as difficult as anyone could experience, and through them, one thing has remained steadfast – that character, integrity and professional dedication. There is no one I admire more. The City of Salisbury is certainly fortunate to have someone of his caliber in a leadership position. Salisbury is a better place because of his service.”

In final remarks, Councilman Lewis offered these words, previously offered by Parnell in a public information format. When asked “what has been most meaningful to you in all of your years of the fire service”, Parnell’s response had been, “The most meaningful thing in my years is the honor to be husband of the most understanding and dedicated Tonya, and father of Bobby and Adam who have sacrificed much while I attended fire department meetings, training, and emergency calls. I really can’t identify one particular thing in the fire service that is more meaningful than another. All have been extremely meaningful to me.”

Parnell immediately embraced his family and accepted the award from Lewis, before a standing ovation crowd. Parnell shares that he was surprised by the award and greatly honored and humbled to be named the 2008 recipient. “I am extremely proud of the dedicated firefighters of the Salisbury Fire Department and honored to serve as their chief.”

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